



Gender Fair Language: What's In a Name?

In the past, men's jobs were identified by certain titles such as, policeman, fireman, draftsman, etc. Women's jobs were described by titles such as stewardess, cleaning lady, housewife...

As times changed, so did the job titles and words used to describe people. Women cannot be *policemen* or *firemen* or *freshmen* in college. More women have entered careers which were considered "men's work," and language has had to change to reflect this. Now we hear words such as flight attendant and homemaker to refer to both men and women working in careers that were traditionally "women's work."

Some words are stubborn. Think about these titles: *foreman*, *chairman* and *freshman*. Each tells us a little about history and power. In the past, who had the top positions in business and politics? *Foremen* and *chairmen*. Who had access and resources to own land? The *landlords*. And who attended ninth grade and high school and college? *Freshmen*. Although these gender-biased labels reflect our past more accurately than the present, they are still used. Sometimes we are told that titles are "inclusive" and o.k. to use for both men and women. This is not true. Let's try a label reversal. What would happen if someone referred to a group of males as "you gals?" Yet females are called "you guys" all the time.

As we think about our future careers, it is important to consider the words people will use to name us. We can use language to reinforce our choices. As students considering nontraditional careers, we must be willing to name ourselves and challenge those who use language that does not represent who we are.

Here are some words and job titles. Can you think of ways you would change these titles to make them more gender fair or neutral?

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| foreman | congressman | anchorman | journeyman |
| housewife | manpower | man made | freshman |
| weatherman | mailman | landlord | metermaid |
| repairman | policeman | tomboy | cleaning lady |
| fisherman | sportsmanship | manhole | men working |
| male nurse | bachelor's degree | workman's compensation | waitress |
| draftsman | stewardess | | |